



FEMINIST REIMAGINING IN *FAIR ROSALINE*: NATASHA SOLOMONS' REVISION OF ROMEO AND JULIET THROUGH HAROLD BLOOM'S REVISIONARY RATIOS

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ABSTRACT

The growing inclusivity in today's literary world offers female writers the chance to explore a wide range of themes, even those that were previously considered exclusive for male writers. It led to the re-examination and reinterpretation of classic literature through a feminist lens. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of Natasha Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* through the lens of Harold Bloom's "Revisionary Ratios." This paper employs mainly qualitative research design by combining textual analysis and comparative literary criticism to explore Natasha Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* as a feminist reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* through the lens of Harold Bloom's "Revisionary Ratios" theory and feminism literary theory. The texts of *Fair Rosaline* and *Romeo and Juliet* serve as the primary data. Not only that, this research adds to the larger discussion concerning the place of women in literature while also improving our understanding of *Fair Rosaline* and its connection to *Romeo and Juliet*, but also offers new insights into how feminist writers reimagine classical text by subverting Shakespeare's original work-offering a new narrative that emphasizes female agency and critiques traditional gender dynamics by highlighting the ways in which Solomons reimagines a marginalized character and challenges traditional narratives.

Keywords: *Fair Rosaline, feminism, reinterpretation, revisionary ratios, Romeo and Juliet.*

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan inklusivitas di dunia sastra saat ini memberikan kesempatan bagi penulis perempuan untuk mengeksplorasi berbagai tema yang bahkan sebelumnya dianggap eksklusif untuk penulis laki-laki. Hal ini menyebabkan adanya pengkajian dan penafsiran ulang sastra klasik melalui lensa feminis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan analisis yang komprehensif terhadap novel *Fair Rosaline* karya Natasha Solomons melalui lensa "Revisionary Ratios" dari Harold Bloom. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif dengan menggabungkan analisis tekstual dan kritik sastra komparatif untuk mengeksplorasi novel *Fair Rosaline* karya Natasha Solomons sebagai reinterpretasi feminis dari *Romeo and Juliet* karya Shakespeare melalui lensa teori "Revisionary Ratios" dari Harold Bloom dan teori sastra feminisme. Teks *Fair Rosaline* dan *Romeo and Juliet* menjadi data primer. Penelitian ini tidak hanya menambah diskusi yang lebih luas mengenai posisi perempuan dalam sastra sekaligus meningkatkan pemahaman kita mengenai *Fair Rosaline* dan hubungannya dengan *Romeo and Juliet*, tetapi juga menawarkan wawasan baru mengenai bagaimana para penulis feminis menafsirkan ulang teks klasik dengan menumbangkan karya asli Shakespeare sembari menawarkan sebuah narasi baru yang menekankan agensi perempuan dan mengkritik dinamika gender tradisional dengan menyoroti cara-cara Solomon menafsirkan ulang karakter yang termarginalkan dan menantang narasi-narasi tradisional.

Kata Kunci: *Fair Rosaline, feminisme, penafsiran ulang, revisionary ratios, Romeo dan Juliet.*

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INTRODUCTION

In the current era, it is evident that humanity has largely achieved what can be termed as 'freedom of literature,' defined here as the fundamental rights and privileges of individuals to engage in the access or creation of written works freely, regardless of their background, age, or gender. This accomplishment is undeniably significant, largely attributable to the contributions of feminism, which advocates for universal freedom, including the right of women to publicly express their voices in writing without facing repercussions, a stark contrast to earlier times. In the Elizabethan era, for instance, a woman would have faced considerable reservations about engaging in writing since they were discouraged from reading, it could be seen by how formal schooling was rare for girls, as it was not considered necessary for their roles in society, which were focused on managing households and family life—and pretty much “far fewer girls received an education compared to boys,” and even then if they did receive literacy education, they were most likely “the children in better-off families, the gentry and aristocracy,” (Cartwright, 2020, par. 1, 2). Some exceptions were made to “appreciate the bible,” and rather than fostering intellectual interests, the education they got was rudimentary and mostly focused on enhancing their domestic abilities or getting them ready for marriage (Cartwright, 2020, par. 3). According to Rorintulus et al. (2022), literary works pose quite a significant role as a “medium to describe the reality of people's lives, including social problems, thought events, life experiences, and life views,” (p. 149). However, women and girls were only able to write letters and prose, which was considered a part of epistolary literature (Daybell, 2009). Yet not even those letters would even be considered literature since “letters did not count,” (Woolf, 2002, Four par. 18). Unlike the present, where literature is critiqued based on its quality, the mere act of a woman taking up pen and paper in those times was often considered taboo. Thus, many women begin to compose without requiring omitting “feminine” identities due to the majority of magazines' adoption of the anonymous or pseudonymous publication convention (Easley, 2015).

During Shakespeare's time, societal norms heavily restricted women's participation in literature. Women who dared to write, particularly on subjects deemed philosophical or profound, often faced harsh criticism, as highlighted by Gilbert and Gubar (1979). According to Gilbert & Gubar (1979), women were vilified for even “doing what male poets do,” such as writing topics that are considered philosophical and deep, “God, fate, time, and integrity,” as seen by Theodore Roethke's “charges most frequently leveled against poetry by women,” (xviii):

Two of the [most frequent] charges ... are lack of range—in subject matter, in emotional tone—and lack of a sense of humor. And one could, in individual instances among writers of real talent, add other aesthetic and moral shortcomings: the spinning out; the embroidering of trivial themes; a concern with the mere surfaces of life—that special province of the feminine talent in prose—hiding from the real agonies of the spirit; refusing to face up to what existence is; lyric or religious posturing; running between the boudoir and the altar; stamping a tiny foot against God or lapsing into a sententiousness that implies the author has re-invented integrity; carrying on excessively about Fate, about time; lamenting the lot of the

woman; caterwauling; writing the same poem about fifty times, and so on. . . (Roethke, as cited in Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, xvii).

Gilbert & Gubar (1979) pointed out the inconsistencies in Roethke's supposed "objective" criticism, as the passage above implies that "women are taxed for both triviality and sententiousness, for both silly superficiality and melodramatic 'carrying on' about profound subjects" (xviii). Their analysis indicates that Roethke's choice of language implies that the gender of these female literary figures is the factor that ostensibly diminishes the integrity of their artistic expression. Evidently, one might contend that Roethke lacks a nuanced understanding of women's literature, except for the conspicuous flaw he attributes to it—namely, that it was authored by women—thus rendering his "objective" criticism rife with contradictions, serving no purpose other than to reinforce his own sententiousness.

In contrast to the restrictive literary environment of the 16th century, contemporary society affords a significantly more inclusive and supportive space for literary expression, particularly for women. As previously stated, the "fundamental rights and privileges of individuals to engage in the creation and consumption of written works freely"—a definition of literary freedom—aligns with Susan Sontag's perspective, who asserts that literature itself embodies freedom:

To have access to literature, world literature, was to escape the prison of national vanity, of philistinism, of compulsory provincialism, of inane schooling, of imperfect destinies and bad luck. Literature was the passport to enter a larger life; that is, the zone of freedom.

Literature was freedom. Especially in a time in which the values of reading and inwardness are so strenuously challenged, literature is freedom. (Sontag, 2007, p. 209)

The statement above is compelling and aligns with the premise that within a specified scope of literary freedom, authors possess the autonomy to craft their works while seamlessly incorporating inspiration derived from other literary sources as a catalyst. This perspective does not endorse plagiarism but rather encourages emerging poets to draw inspiration from their predecessors, allowing them to grow and eventually cultivate a unique voice. Just as a sapling draws nourishment from the soil and sunlight to grow into a sturdy tree, aspiring poets can draw from the rich soil of literary tradition and the vibrant sunlight of diverse perspectives. Even the highly esteemed William Shakespeare drew inspiration from other poets.

Today's literary landscape offers a more inclusive space where women writers can explore a wide range of themes, including—but not only—those previously considered the exclusive domain of male writers, but also free from coercive obedience and the authority of the 16th century that is stifling and would generally self-deprecatingly sense of oneself in the letters composed (Daybell, 2010). All credits are due to liberal feminism, which "emphasizes the value of freedom and holds that the just state ensures freedom for individuals and roles for the state and insists on freedom for women" (Saputri & Neisya, 2021, p. 56). This shift has not only allowed for greater diversity in literature but has also led to the re-examination and reinterpretation of classic texts through a feminist lens. One such reimagining is Natasha Solomons' *Fair Rosaline*, a novel that revisits Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* from the perspective of Rosaline, a character who plays a

minor role in the original play. Through this reimagining, Solomons challenges the traditional roles of female characters and offers a new narrative that highlights women's agency and autonomy.

While *Romeo and Juliet* is undoubtedly one of the most influential works of Western literature, it is less widely known that Shakespeare himself was influenced by earlier works, most notably Arthur Brooke's *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet* (Bate, 1994; McKittrick, 2006; Moyer, 2024; Shakespeare, 2012). Brooke's poem, in turn, was inspired by a "French translation of a tale by the Italian writer Matteo Bandello," (Androwich, 2023, line 4). This lineage of influence underscores the idea that literature is inherently intertextual, with each new work building upon and responding to the texts that came before it. In this sense, Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* can be seen as part of a long tradition of literary reinterpretation, one that both honors its source material and critiques it from a contemporary feminist perspective.

To analyze the ways in which Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* engages with and revises *Romeo and Juliet*, this study employs Harold Bloom's theory of "Revisionary Ratios," as outlined in his seminal work *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973, 1997). Bloom's theory posits that all poets (and by extension, all writers) are influenced by their predecessors and that this influence creates a sense of anxiety that shapes their creative process. Bloom identifies six *Revisionary Ratios*—*clinamen*, *tessera*, *kenosis*, *daemonization*, *askesis*, and *apophrades*—each of which represents a different strategy that writers use to grapple with the influence of earlier works. By applying these concepts to *Fair Rosaline*, this study offers insight into how Solomons engages with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* on a deeper level, beyond simple adaptation. Bloom's framework helps to examine how Solomons extends and reinterprets the original work's ideas, characters, and narrative in addition to drawing from it. This results in a distinctive dialogue between the texts that gives Solomons' novel additional levels of significance.

One of the key contributions of this study is its emphasis on the concept of *tessera*, which Bloom defines as a process of completion and antithesis. In *Fair Rosaline*, Solomons borrows elements from *Romeo and Juliet*, such as characters and settings, but reworks them to create a narrative that challenges the original's patriarchal assumptions. By giving Rosaline a voice and a central role in the story, Solomons not only completes Shakespeare's work by filling in the gaps left by the original but also creates an antithesis to the traditional portrayal of women in literature. In doing so, she offers a new perspective on a well-known text, one that foregrounds the experiences and agency of female characters.

This study also addresses a gap in the existing literature on feminist reimaginings of classic texts. While there has been considerable scholarship on feminist adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, much of this work has focused on more well-known characters such as Juliet or Lady Macbeth. By contrast, Rosaline has received relatively little attention, both in Shakespearean scholarship and in feminist literary criticism. This study seeks to rectify this oversight by providing a detailed analysis of how Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* reclaims and reinterprets Rosaline's character. In doing so, it contributes to the ongoing discussion about the role of women in literature and the ways in which feminist writers can challenge and revise canonical texts.

Moreover, this study offers a new perspective on the application of Bloom's theory to feminist literary criticism. While Bloom's work has been influential in the field of literary studies, it has also been critiqued for its focus on male writers and its lack of attention to gender. By applying Bloom's *Revisionary Ratios* to a feminist reimagining of *Romeo and Juliet*, this study demonstrates how his concepts can be used to analyze the ways in which women writers engage with and revise the literary canon. This approach not only expands the applicability of Bloom's theory but also highlights the intersections between feminist and intertextual approaches to literature.

All in all, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of Natasha Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* through the lens of Harold Bloom's *Revisionary Ratios*. By doing so, it aims to offer new insights into the ways in which feminist writers can reimagine classic texts from a play written by a playwright into a novel by a novelist, through a feminist lens and challenge traditional narratives. This analysis also contributes to the broader field of feminist literary criticism by highlighting the importance of reclaiming and reinterpreting female characters who have been marginalized or overlooked in the literary canon. This study underscores the significance of Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* not only as a feminist reimagining of *Romeo and Juliet* by employing Harold Bloom's *Revisionary Ratios*, but also as a powerful example of the ways in which contemporary writers can engage with and transform the literary traditions they inherit.

LITERATURE REVIEW

William Shakespeare's plays have long served as a pivotal subject for feminist analysis by providing rich material for exploring themes such as gender equality, female empowerment, and the complexities of women's relationships (Novy, 2017). The enduring relevance of Shakespeare in feminist discourse is evidenced by the diverse ways in which scholars engage with his works to uncover and critique the portrayal of women within a historically patriarchal framework.

Feminist critics have extensively debated whether Shakespeare's works reinforce or challenge patriarchal norms. On one side of the debate, some scholars commend Shakespeare for his complex and strong female characters who exhibit agency, intelligence, and complexity. Characters such as Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, and Viola in *Twelfth Night* are frequently highlighted for their significant roles and dynamic personalities, which transcend the traditional limitations imposed on women in Elizabethan society (Novy, 2017). These characters often navigate and manipulate the constraints of their social environments, thereby demonstrating a form of resistance against the prevailing gender norms of their time.

Conversely, other feminist critics argue that Shakespeare's portrayal of women can also perpetuate subordination and reinforce patriarchal structures. For example, characters like Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Desdemona in *Othello* are often viewed as embodiments of the tragic consequences of female subjugation. Ophelia's descent into madness and eventual death, as well as Desdemona's murder, are interpreted as manifestations of the destructive impact of patriarchal oppression on women's lives and identities (Novy, 2017). These interpretations suggest that while Shakespeare presents strong and complex female characters, he simultaneously upholds and critiques the patriarchal norms of his era which results in a comprehensive and sometimes contradictory portrayal of gender dynamics.

The field of feminist Shakespeare criticism gained significant momentum during the second wave of feminism, a period marked by increased scholarly focus on gender and literature. Juliet Dusinberre’s landmark 1975 work, *The Argument of the Women: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, is often credited with pioneering feminist approaches to Shakespearean studies (Aughterson, 2021). Dusinberre’s analysis emphasized the importance of re-examining Shakespeare’s plays through a gendered lens, arguing that women’s voices and experiences within his works deserve critical attention and reinterpretation. Her work laid the foundation for subsequent feminist critiques that seek to uncover the underlying gender biases and power dynamics present in Shakespeare’s narratives.

Since Dusinberre’s initial contributions, feminist scholars have continued to explore various dimensions of gender in Shakespeare’s plays. Callaghan (2000) highlights that contemporary feminist criticism encompasses a wide range of analytical approaches, including the examination of “language use, social economies, race, sexuality, and religion,” (p. 5). For instance, feminist analyses of Shakespeare’s language often focus on how diction and rhetorical strategies serve to construct and negotiate gender identities. Additionally, the exploration of social economies investigates how economic power and social status intersect with gender, influencing the roles and agency of female characters within the plays. Scholars also examine the intersections of race, sexuality, and religion to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these factors complicate and enrich the portrayal of women in Shakespeare’s works (Callaghan, 2000).

A significant advancement in feminist Shakespeare criticism is the proposal to reimagine the relationship between Shakespeare and his sources as a culturally determined reading, rather than a simple process of borrowing and adaptation. McEachern (1988) advocates for this perspective by suggesting that understanding the cultural and historical contexts in which Shakespeare wrote is essential for a deeper comprehension of his portrayal of women. This approach posits that Shakespeare’s depiction of female characters cannot be fully appreciated without considering the societal norms and cultural expectations of the Elizabethan period. By adopting a culturally informed reading, scholars can better understand the ways in which Shakespeare both conforms to and subverts contemporary gender norms, thereby offering a more nuanced interpretation of his works (McEachern, 1988).

Contemporary scholars continually emphasize the ongoing relevance of feminist approaches to Shakespeare studies. Aughterson (2021) notes that modern feminist criticism remains a vital component of Shakespearean scholarship which adapts to new theoretical frameworks and incorporates diverse perspectives to enhance the analysis of his works. The integration of intersectional feminist theory, which considers the overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage, has further enriched the field by allowing for more nuanced interpretations of Shakespeare’s female characters. This intersectional approach enables scholars to explore how factors such as race, class, and sexuality intersect with gender, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in Shakespeare’s portrayal of women (Aughterson, 2021).

Recent feminist analyses have expanded to include performance studies, examining how contemporary productions of Shakespeare’s plays reflect and shape modern understandings of gender. Directors and actors often bring feminist interpretations to the stage, reimagining characters and relationships in ways that highlight issues of gender inequality and female empowerment. This performative aspect of feminist Shakespeare criticism bridges the gap

between textual analysis and lived experience. It demonstrates the dynamic and evolving nature of feminist engagement with Shakespeare's works. By reinterpreting and recontextualizing female characters in performance, feminist scholars and practitioners contribute to the ongoing dialogue about gender and power in literature and society.

The literature on feminist analysis of Shakespeare's plays is both extensive and complex; it reflects ongoing debates and evolving methodologies within the field. From Juliet Dusinberre's pioneering work to contemporary intersectional and performance-based approaches, feminist critics continue to uncover and challenge the complexities of gender representation in Shakespeare's oeuvre. This sustained scholarly interest not only deepens our understanding of Shakespeare's plays but also contributes to broader discussions about gender, power, and representation in literature by highlighting the enduring significance of feminist perspectives in literary criticism in which Natasha Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* reimagines *Romeo and Juliet* from a feminist lens, positioning the previously sidelined Rosaline as the central figure and reshaping the narrative to critique traditional portrayals of female agency and autonomy.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design by combining textual analysis and comparative literary criticism to explore Natasha Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* as a feminist reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The research aims to examine how Solomons reimagines the narrative through the lens of Harold Bloom's *Revisionary Ratios* and feminist literary theory which focus particularly on character development, narrative structure, and thematic shifts.

Textual Analysis

The primary method of research is close textual analysis. This involves a detailed examination of *Fair Rosaline* to identify and interpret key elements such as character portrayal, narrative techniques, thematic motifs, and structural innovations. The analysis pays particular attention to how Solomons adapts and transforms the original text of *Romeo and Juliet* to create a feminist revision that challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. The textual analysis is guided by the principles of feminist literary criticism, which seeks to uncover and critique the ways in which literature reinforces or challenges patriarchal norms.

Comparative Literary Criticism

In addition to textual analysis, this study employs comparative literary criticism to juxtapose *Fair Rosaline* with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This comparison is crucial for understanding the ways in which Solomons engages with the original text and reconfigures it to serve her feminist objectives. The comparative approach focuses on key areas such as character agency, the portrayal of male and female relationships, and the reimagining of central conflicts within the narrative. By comparing these elements across both texts, the research highlights the specific strategies Solomons uses to challenge the original narrative.

Application of Theoretical Framework

The research is further structured around Harold Bloom's *Revisionary Ratios* as the primary theoretical framework. Each of Bloom's six ratios—*clinamen*, *tessera*, *kenosis*, *daemonization*, *askesis*, and *apophrades*—is applied to *Fair Rosaline* to explore how Solomons revises and reinterprets Shakespeare's work. This application involves identifying instances in the text where Solomons' narrative diverges from, critiques, or completes the original *Romeo and Juliet*, and analyzing these instances through the lens of Bloom's theory.

Not only that, but feminist literary theory is also integrated into the analysis to examine how gender dynamics are reconfigured in Solomons' retelling. The feminist lens allows for a critical assessment of how *Fair Rosaline* addresses issues of female agency, power, and solidarity, and how these themes contrast with or complement the original Shakespearean text.

Data Collection

The primary data for this research consists of the texts of *Fair Rosaline* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Supplementary data includes critical essays, reviews, and scholarly articles that discuss feminist literary criticism, Bloom's theory, and contemporary reimaginings of classic literature. These sources provide additional context and support for the analysis, ensuring that the research is grounded in a broad understanding of both the original text and its modern reinterpretation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is conducted through a systematic coding process, wherein key themes, motifs, and narrative strategies are identified, compared, and categorized according to the research objectives. The analysis is iterative by involving a comparative way of multiple readings of the texts to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* functions as a feminist revision of *Romeo and Juliet*. The findings are then synthesized into a coherent argument that addresses the research questions and contributes to the broader scholarly discourse on feminist reimaginings of canonical literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Harold Blooms' Revisionary Ratios

This study solely focuses on analyzing the differences between Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and its most modern and recent reimagining, Natasha Solomons' *Fair Rosaline*, by employing Harold Bloom's "Revisionary Ratios."

In his book titled *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), with the second edition released in 1997, Harold Bloom proposed the idea of the "Revisionary Ratios," which speculates on the stages of "poetic development." The core idea of Bloom's theory circles around "poets" artistic endeavors or how their creative processes occur while maintaining a connection with preceding poets, no matter how undetermined the state of the relationship is, which in the process could hamper their own creative processes and thus creates a sense of dread and anxiety

from those preceding poets. He claims that "the poet in a poet" is motivated to compose by studying another poet's poetry and will generate something that is in danger of becoming derivative of current poetry and so weak. To sum it up, this book discusses the psychological aspect, mainly the struggle of the newer poets (authors) and how they conquered the anxiety of influence from their creative forefathers. The book is divided into six categories as Bloom introduces his "revisionary ratios," they are *clinamen*, *tessera*, *kenosis*, *daemonization*, *askesis*, and lastly, *apophrades*.

Here are Harold Bloom's (1997, pp. 14-15) Revisionary Ratios, abridged:

1. *Clinamen*, also known as poetic misreading or misprision proper—in which the current poet applies a corrective movement in order to swerve or diverge from the original poem that the preceding poet had written while acknowledging that the preceding poet was correct up to a point, the new poem argues that a change in direction should have been made. The term *clinamen* was adopted from Lucretius, who discusses the deviation of atoms, leading to the possibility of change.
2. *Tessera*, or completion and antithesis – as Bloom defines it – refers to the current poet's effort of "completing" the preceding poet's poem that was deemed unable to or fell short of pushing the boundaries yet keeping the same terminology and imbuing it with new significance. Bloom took the term *tessera* from "the ancient mystery cult" which is used to refer to "a token of recognition," meaning a reconstructed full picture when a fragment is coupled with others.
3. *Kenosis*, which refers to "a movement toward discontinuity with the precursor," where the current poet then lowers themselves "as though he were ceasing to be a poet" in a manner that also diminishes the preceding poet's poem so that the later poet is not diminished as much as it may initially appear. Bloom refers to this term as a "breaking device similar to the defence mechanisms our psyches employ against repetition compulsions," which he adopted from St. Paul who employed this term to allude to Jesus's "humbling or emptying out when he accepts reduction from divine to human status".
4. *Daemonization*, a term that Bloom took from Neoplatonism that refers to "an intermediary being, neither divine nor human, enters into the adept to aid him (the preceding poet)." Bloom defines *daemonization* as a "movement towards a personalized Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime," denoting the implication by the current poet that the preceding poem originates from a source beyond it, intending to abstract and diminish the distinctiveness of the earlier work.
5. *Askesis*, a term taken from "the practice of pre-Socrates shamans" which Bloom defines as a "movement of self-purgation which intends the attainment of a state of solitude." The current poet undergoes curtailing strategically mitigates the perception of their intrinsic "human and imaginative endowment" to establish a distinctive identity and highlight their individuality. This extends to the preceding poet, accentuating their limitations and individuality, creating a distinction from the current poet.
6. As Bloom defines it, *Apophrades*, or the return of the dead, refers to the later stages of the current poet's life, in which they intentionally let the preceding poet's influence into their poem. This deliberate act, however, creates an "uncanny effect" that gives the impression that the precursor's work is founded on the current poet's creativity. Borrowed from the Athenian concept, *apophrades* means "unlucky days upon which the dead returned to reinhabit the houses in which they had lived".

The Influence of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* on Natasha Solomons' *Fair Rosaline*

Before embarking on an in-depth analysis of *Fair Rosaline*, it is essential for one to familiarize oneself with the initial premise of the novel. *Fair Rosaline* is a subversive retelling of Shakespeare's well-known tragedy; the narrative unfolds through the perspective of Rosaline, Romeo's former lover who has been cast aside. Her unique vantage point creates a wholly distinct storyline. The story begins with Rosaline, a headstrong 16-year-old lady, mourning the loss of her mother due to the plague that befell Verona. Rosaline is resolved to live life to the fullest before being imprisoned after the death of her mother due to the prevalent plague in Verona and knowing of her father's decision to send her to a nunnery. She is determined to make the most of her limited time, even if it means dressing up to enter one of the Montagues' legendary parties. At one of these parties, she meets Romeo, a beautiful and attractive stranger who declares his love for her right of way. He promises to save her from Verona, her father's intentions, and the coming life in the convent.

Application of Harold Bloom's "Revisionary Ratios"

The palpability of Shakespeare's influence on Natasha Solomons' work could unmistakably be the manifestation of one of Harold Bloom's revisionary ratios: *tessera*. According to Zahroh (2023), *tessera* is where "the successor borrows a symbol of their predecessor and completes the predecessor's work, which in the end produces a new sense of his predecessor's work. Thus, the new work creates an antithesis from the previous work," (Zahroh, 2023, p. 3). Natasha Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* certainly has borrowed some symbols from the original *Romeo and Juliet*. From the premise, it is clear that *Fair Rosaline* borrows some aspects of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, namely the characters and settings from the original play, such as the side character Rosaline, which has become the pivotal force of driving the plot forward as she is now the protagonist of the story in *Fair Rosaline*. Due to this, Natasha Solomon essentially proposes a new perspective on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, thus creating an antithesis to the original play. It is perhaps also worth considering that while Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was written in a play format, Natasha Solomon delivers the story of *Fair Rosaline* through narration, much like any regular novel.

Described as "[t]he most exciting historical retelling of 2023: a subversive, powerful untelling of *Romeo and Juliet*," Natasha Solomons presents a new perspective on the original narrative through a feminist lens. The antithesis to Shakespeare's work is evident from the outset, as the story is immediately reframed through the eyes of a character whose voice was previously unheard and whose fate remained obscured in the original play. Unlike in Solomons' reinterpretation, Rosaline in Shakespeare's work is only briefly mentioned by Romeo as he laments to his cousin Benvolio about his broken heart due to Rosaline's choice to remain chaste:

ROMEO

Well in that hit you miss. She'll not be hit

With Cupid's arrow. She hath Dian's wit,
And, in strong proof of chastity well armed,
From love's weak childish bow she lives uncharmed.
She will not stay the siege of loving terms,
Nor bide th' encounter of assailing eyes,
Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold.
O, she is rich in beauty, only poor
That, when she dies, with beauty dies her store.

BENVOLIO

Then she hath sworn that she will still live chaste?

ROMEO

She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste;
For beauty, starved with her severity,
Cuts beauty off from all posterity.
She is too fair, too wise, wisely too fair,
To merit bliss by making me despair,
She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow
Do I live dead, that live to tell it now. (1.1.216–32)

Shakespeare only elaborated on Rosaline further than a mere afterthought. It is also worth noting that Rosaline's lack of voice did not mention how nor why Rosaline chose the life of chastity in the first place. In Natasha Solomons' book, it could be seen clearly that the life of chastity was not much of a choice for her; it has been chosen for her—not of her own volition.

By recontextualizing Rosaline's chastity as a lack of choice rather than a voluntary commitment, Solomons brings to light the theme of female autonomy—or the lack thereof—in a patriarchal society. Rosaline's story in *Fair Rosaline* becomes a commentary on how women's lives and bodies are often governed by the decisions of others—under men's law" (MacKinnon, 2007, p. 1), "as an object" (Beauvoir, 2012, p. 37)—rather than their own agency. This reimagining not only provides depth to Rosaline's character but also critiques the societal norms that Shakespeare's original play takes for granted. Through this lens, Rosaline emerges as a symbol of resistance against the oppressive forces that dictate her life, a stark contrast to her portrayal in *Romeo and Juliet*, where she is barely more than a shadow in the background of the narrative.

Snatching the letter, she read with creeping horror. 'She tells me that I'm to go to a nunnery. This is a lie! She did not want this! You do. You wish to save my dowry!'

A stinging pain rang out in Rosaline's ear and it took a moment for her to realise that her father had hit her.

'You forget, you are mine to dispose of as I choose. But, no. This was truly your mother's wish. (Solomons, 2023, p. 13)

Natasha Solomons demonstrates significant creative freedom in her writing, particularly through her expansion of the backstory that explains the origins of the longstanding feud between the House of Capulet and the House of Montague. In Shakespeare's original play, this deep-seated

animosity between the two families is presented as a given, a conflict that drives the tragic events of the story but is never fully explained. The audience is left to accept the feud as an unexplained force that shapes the destinies of Romeo and Juliet, with little insight into the history or reasons behind it.

In *Fair Rosaline*, however, Solomons explores this unexplored territory, providing a richly detailed account of how this enmity began. By crafting a backstory that traces the origins of the feud to specific events and personal grievances, Solomons not only adds depth to the narrative but also offers a more nuanced understanding of the characters and their motivations. This expansion of the lore transforms the feud from a vague and abstract concept into a dynamic element of the story, rooted in the personal and political histories of the Capulet and Montague families.

Solomons' detailed exploration of the feud serves multiple purposes. First, it provides a context that helps to explain the extreme hostility and violence that characterize the interactions between the two houses. By understanding the origins of this hatred, readers can better appreciate the intensity of the conflict and the challenges that Romeo and Juliet face in their doomed love affair. Second, this backstory enriches the world of the novel, making it more immersive and believable by grounding the central conflict in a plausible historical and social context.

Solomons' approach reflects a broader trend in contemporary literature to reimagine and expand upon classic stories by filling in the gaps left by their original authors. In doing so, she not only honors the legacy of Shakespeare's work but also reinterprets it through a modern lens, providing readers with a fresh perspective on a familiar tale. This creative decision enhances the narrative complexity of *Fair Rosaline* and underscores Solomons' ability to engage with Shakespeare's text in a way that is both respectful and innovative, offering a deeper and more layered portrayal of the feud that lies at the heart of this tragic story.

But like Lucifer himself, the Montagues had not always been wicked, and the Capulets had not always abhorred them. There was a time when the two great houses of Verona had been, if not friends, then in agreement upon the wisdom in forming an alliance. There had been marriages between the families. However, many years before, during her grandfather's youth, a marriage had been promised and agreed, and then the Capulet bride cast aside. It seemed the groom had chosen the Church and love of God over his bride, rapidly rising to the rank of cardinal.

The insult had not been forgiven, but had warped and grown and calcified into hate, hardening with each year that passed. Or so it was said. Rosaline felt certain there was more to the feud than this slight but could find none who would tell her. (Solomons, 2023, p. 24)

The passage above demonstrates how Natasha Solomons effectively creates a "completion" of her predecessor's work while still honoring the original by borrowing significant elements, such as the names of the major houses—central to the conflict—and expanding their lore with her unique creative vision. In doing so, she constructs a new narrative that is inspired by, yet distinct from, the original *Romeo and Juliet*. Solomons' creative liberties also extend to character

development, particularly in bringing Rosaline to life in ways that Shakespeare did not. This is evident in Rosaline's portrayal in the novel, where she is depicted as courageous and impulsive, especially for a woman of that era. An example of this is seen in her bold decision to disguise herself as a man in order to infiltrate a party hosted by the Montagues, her family's nemesis. This action clearly embodies Rosaline's characterization as "headstrong and independent," as described in the book's synopsis.

At the Montague's party, Rosaline met Romeo Montague, where they somehow briefly exchanged blows with blades to prove Rosaline's masculinity as she was disguised as a man, yet eventually, Romeo concluded her gender almost immediately by outing her feminine traits despite the articles of clothing. Romeo offered her sweet words and promises, which in turn, Rosaline also provided back some witty but friendly remarks. Thus began the start of their budding romance, or so she thought. Not for long, Rosaline began to have some reservations about all the words Romeo had told her and eventually decided to break the relationship—but then, as stated in the synopsis, "Romeo's gaze (...) turn[s] towards her cousin, thirteen-year-old Juliet. Gradually Rosaline realises that it is not only Juliet's reputation at stake, but her life" (Solomons, 2023, *Back Cover*).

The most prevalent antithesis in Natasha Solomon, aside from the characterization of Rosaline, is how she characterizes Romeo in *Fair Rosaline*. Romeo could no longer be seen as a lovestruck teenager with a broken heart because, unlike the original source, Natasha Solomon illustrates Romeo as the villain of the story. Evident in *Fair Rosaline* is the revelation that Romeo behaves as a predator. "For a moment, she felt haunted by Romeo. This courtship didn't feel like a joyous dance any longer: it was a pursuit, and she the prey" (Solomons, 2023, p. 150). His eloquent expressions take on an unsettling tone, as he employs his smooth and artful speeches as instruments of seduction, targeting much younger, innocent girls—just as Rosaline described, "Love with him was carnal and delicious and all-consuming: he wasn't just a hunter but a thief, stealing from girls their very selves," (Solomons, 2023, p. 219). In this quote, Rosaline describes how Romeo's love is not as pure as it seems when she tries to comfort Juliet, whose wrist is filled with scars. From this course of action, Rosaline has claimed the title hero of this story, for she has essentially saved Juliet from her supposed lover—Romeo. The fact that it was implied in *Fair Rosaline* that Romeo was someone in at least their 20s – whereas, in Shakespeare's original *Romeo and Juliet*, his age was never specified – makes it a lot disturbing.

The transformation of Romeo from a romantic hero to a predatory figure is not merely a narrative device but carries significant implications for contemporary reinterpretations of male heroism in literature. By portraying Romeo as a manipulative predator, Solomons challenges the traditional romanticization of male characters who exert control and dominance over women under the guise of love. This portrayal aligns with broader trends in feminist reimaginings of classic texts, where male characters who were once idealized are now scrutinized for their behavior, particularly in the context of power dynamics and gender relations. The recharacterization of Romeo suggests a critical commentary on how patriarchal structures have historically shaped the

depiction of male protagonists. It also invites readers to reconsider the cultural narratives that have long romanticized such characters, often at the expense of female agency.

Rosaline's newfound agency in *Fair Rosaline* is another critical element that reflects broader trends in feminist literature. In the original *Romeo and Juliet*, Rosaline is a silent, passive figure whose primary function is to serve as a plot device that leads Romeo to Juliet. However, in Solomons' retelling, Rosaline is not only given a voice but is also depicted as a complex, autonomous character who navigates her circumstances with courage and determination. This shift in characterization mirrors the feminist movement's efforts to reclaim and reimagine female characters who have been marginalized or silenced in literary history.

Rosaline's agency is particularly significant in the context of feminist reimagining's of classic texts because it challenges the traditional roles assigned to women in literature. Instead of being a passive object of male desire, Rosaline becomes an active agent in her own story. This transformation is emblematic of a larger trend in feminist literature, where the focus is on empowering female characters by giving them depth, complexity, and autonomy. By reimagining Rosaline in this way, Solomons not only challenges the traditional narrative of *Romeo and Juliet* but also contributes to the ongoing discourse about the representation of women in literature.

Natasha Solomons effectively deconstructs Shakespeare's work while preserving the fundamental elements of the original *Romeo and Juliet*. However, Solomons' narrative approach diverges from Shakespeare's traditional play format, opting instead for a more contemporary narrative structure. This method proves to be both straightforward and effective in depicting the characterization of Rosaline, allowing readers to gain deeper insight into her thought processes and thereby enhancing our understanding of her character. Consequently, Natasha Solomons' *Fair Rosaline* can be aptly categorized within the framework of *tessera*, as defined by Harold Bloom.

Articulating the Original Contribution

The originality of this analysis lies in its focus on the lesser-explored character of Rosaline, filling a significant gap in the scholarship on feminist adaptations of Shakespeare. While much of the existing literature has concentrated on characters like Juliet or Lady Macbeth, *Fair Rosaline* provides a fresh perspective by foregrounding a character who was largely ignored in the original text. This study bridges the fields of feminist literary criticism and Shakespearean studies by offering a detailed case study that highlights how contemporary feminist writers like Solomons can reclaim and reimagine marginalized voices within canonical texts.

By applying Bloom's "Revisionary Ratios" to *Fair Rosaline*, this analysis not only deepens the understanding of Solomons' novel but also demonstrates the continued relevance of Bloom's theoretical framework in contemporary feminist literary criticism. The study reveals how *Fair Rosaline* engages with and subverts Shakespeare's original work, offering a new narrative that emphasizes female agency and critiques traditional gender dynamics. This contribution is

significant as it expands the discourse on feminist reimaginings of classic literature, providing insights into how these adaptations can both honor and challenge their source material.

The study’s focus on the character of Rosaline and its use of Bloom’s Revisionary Ratios to analyze *Fair Rosaline* make a significant contribution to both feminist literary criticism and Shakespearean studies. By highlighting the ways in which Solomons reimagines a marginalized character and challenges traditional narratives, the analysis offers a new perspective on the potential for feminist reinterpretations of canonical texts. This approach not only enriches the understanding of *Fair Rosaline* but also provides a framework for future studies of feminist adaptations of other literary classics.

All in all, the application of Harold Bloom’s “Revisionary Ratios” to Natasha Solomons’ *Fair Rosaline* offers a nuanced and detailed analysis of how contemporary feminist writers engage with and transform canonical texts. By exploring the ways in which Solomons reimagines the characters, narrative, and themes of *Romeo and Juliet*, this study highlights the potential for feminist reinterpretations to challenge traditional narratives, while also honoring the legacy of the original works. This analysis fills a significant gap in the scholarship on feminist adaptations of Shakespeare and contributes to the broader discourse on the role of women in literature.

CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken a comprehensive examination of Natasha Solomons’ *Fair Rosaline*, revealed the enduring influence of William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* while showcased Solomons’ innovative approach to reimagining this classic narrative. By borrowing key elements such as character names and settings, yet infusing them with a fresh perspective, Solomons succeeds in bringing to life a character—Rosaline—who was nearly absent in the original play. Through her portrayal, Rosaline emerges as a figure of autonomy and agency, challenging the patriarchal narrative that traditionally casts men as the protectors of women. Instead, Rosaline subverts this trope by taking on the role of protector herself, particularly in her efforts to shield Juliet from the predatory advances of Romeo, who is reinterpreted as an antagonist.

The vilification of Romeo is a striking example of Solomons’ antithetical approach to the original *Romeo and Juliet*. Through this lens, Solomons not only reimagines the narrative but also injects it with a feminist perspective that underscores the importance of female solidarity. In this retelling, women are depicted as allies who support one another in the face of danger, a theme that resonates strongly within feminist discourse. As such, *Fair Rosaline* is aptly classified as *tessera* within Harold Bloom’s framework, representing a completion and transformation of Shakespeare’s original work.

Solomons, as a female author, masterfully intertwines classical narrative structures with a feminist viewpoint that challenges traditional roles and expectations assigned to female characters. This comparative analysis demonstrates that Solomons is not merely retelling a familiar story; she

is actively engaging in the revisionary process, showcasing women's agency and resilience against cultural norms. Her contribution is significant in altering the depiction of women in literature, in line with Bloom's theory, which advocates for the necessity of revision and reinterpretation in the literary canon. The feminist undertones in *Fair Rosaline* illustrate that female characters can transcend their traditional roles as mere tropes or passive figures, instead becoming powerful and autonomous agents within their narratives.

This study not only enhances our understanding of *Fair Rosaline* and its relationship to *Romeo and Juliet* but also contributes to the broader conversation about the role of women in literature. Solomons' engagement with this classic tale offers a profound reflection on the evolving landscape of literary representation, ensuring that women's voices are both heard and respected within the larger context of storytelling. Through *Fair Rosaline*, Natasha Solomons reaffirms the importance of reimagining canonical texts in a way that fosters inclusivity and empowers female narratives, thereby enriching the literary tradition with new, critical perspectives.

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